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C O N F I D E N T I A L PRETORIA 004927

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TAGS: PGOV PWMN SF  
SUBJECT: ANC WOMEN'S LEAGUE PRESENTS BLEAK PICTURE

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Donald Teitelbaum. Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. In sharp contrast to President Mbeki's actions and statements in support of women in politics, the General Secretary of the ANC Women's League, Bathabile Dlamini, presented a beleaguered picture of an organization that lacks members, funding, leadership, and vision to PolOffs on 21 November. Lacking substance and style, Dlamini gave a monotonic and unfocused delivery of the League's five goals: increase membership, launch the Progressive Women's Movement, improve relations with the ANC Youth League, create a young women's division, and install a "women's desk." Though she clearly cares about the role of women in South Africa, the League is unlikely to thrive under her leadership. Her lack of charisma and personality, coupled with her recent involvement in the Travelgate scandal, make her an unfortunate choice for a leadership position in a movement that was once so vocal and visible under women such as Winnie Mandela and Albertina Sisulu. Instead, the current Women's League is a shadow of its former self and will likely not take advantage of its potential role as a power broker in the upcoming ANC presidential conference in December 2007, where not only fifty percent of branch delegates will be women but the Women's League will exert influence through its own voting bloc for the first time. END SUMMARY.

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WOMEN'S LEAGUE MEMBERSHIP DWINDLING

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¶2. (C) General Secretary Bathabile Dlamini spoke at length about the ANC Women's League's dwindling membership, which has decreased from 160,000 in 2003 to 46,000 today. The loss is substantial, but perhaps not as dramatic as it appears. During her tenure, Dlamini has focused on correcting the rolls to include only paid members, eliminating ghost members whose signatures were literally forged with an "X." Dlamini said the young age of the members belied members' illiteracy as well as evidence that the same person had written X's down an entire sheet of paper. She noted, however, that the ANC's party rolls continue to grow and that as many as 70 percent of the party's members are women.

¶3. (C) Dlamini also believes that the League has become "a victim of gatekeeping by those who now earn salaries." She went on to say that during apartheid, solidarity was easy when everyone was poor and disadvantaged. She believes membership has become exclusive in some areas, with members recruiting only friends and family members. (Note: Dlamini was likely referring to the benefits that would come with membership, including trips to national conferences and per diem.) In an effort to increase membership, Dlamini said that the League had signed a contract offering cell phones for new members for only \$5 to \$6 a month, but that the

provider reneged on the agreement. (Note: Dlamini did not specify who agreed to provide the phones or why they did not follow through). Dlamini did not offer any other strategies about increasing membership.

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Lack of Funds Affecting Programming  
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14. (C) Dlamini revealed that lack of funding has become a real problem, not only as a result of low membership but also because the ANC does not give them any money. She admitted that the League has had to postpone its national conference to March 2007 from December 2006 because of funding issues. Dlamini said that the League holds one fundraising dinner a year, which raises approximately 3.5 million rand or \$500,000 USD. When asked why they do not get party funds, Dlamini shrugged and told us that the ANC Youth League gets money because they bring actual receipts to ANC headquarters for reimbursement. (COMMENT: It is unclear why the Women's League does not do the same. END COMMENT) Dlamini also admitted that they have only 2 full-time salaried officers and are short-staffed. For example, her personal assistant also handles policy planning and planning conferences. According to Dlamini, they have no media person because they have no volunteer. (Comment: It is unclear if she meant the position is unpaid or if no one applied. END COMMENT)

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ALL OTHER AREAS  
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15. (C) Dlamini barely mentioned the remaining four goals. Clearly jealous of the Youth League's closeness with the ANC, she vowed to work more closely with the Youth League, which she claims has 5 million members. She noted that they would launch a Progressive Women's Movement. (Note: According to the official government website, the Progressive Women's Movement was launched on 3 August, after a decision was taken in January 1990.) Dlamini also said that she would like to launch a women's desk and create a young women's division within the League which dealt specifically with problems facing young women today, but did not go into detail about the issues or the role the new division would play.

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Upcoming Conference Agenda Probably Needs Fleshing Out  
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16. (C) When asked about issues the Women's League would address during their next conference, Dlamini mentioned that she would like women to be encouraged to take ownership of land rather than a subsidy or grant. When asked how extremely poor women with no farming skills or credit could afford to make such a choice, she moved onto the next topic. She also mentioned "women's economic empowerment," but added that she knows "nothing about economics." She also would like to increase women's access to resources like water, food, and health services. Last, she would like to see an increase in women's participation in decision-making roles, "without it being viewed as some sort of gift." Interestingly, she laid part of the blame on women themselves, who often nominate a man to a position of power because they believe "a man must be smarter."

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COMMENT  
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17. (C) Dlamini, who is also an ex-officio member of the National Executive Committee, came across as a woman with little confidence and little ability to stay on subject. However, the death of a close colleague earlier in the week probably contributed to her subdued mood. She is also likely recovering from her role in the Travelgate scandal, in which Dlamini pleaded guilty to defrauding the government of R254,000 or roughly \$35,000 for using air travel vouchers for hotel accommodations and luxury car rentals. Regardless of

extenuating circumstances, however, the Women's League is unlikely to be rejuvenated under Dlamini's direction, despite the inclusion of high-profile women on its Board of Directors, including Deputy President Mlambo-Ngcuka and Minister of Foreign Affairs Dlamini-Zuma. At stake is a golden opportunity afforded to them by President Mbeki to influence the upcoming ANC presidential election. For the first time, the ANC Women's League (and the Youth League) have been given 53 votes at the upcoming conference in December 2007. Though a small proportion of the roughly 3400 total votes, the bloc could be a tie breaker if delegates were to vote along gender lines given that 50 percent of all branch delegates are supposed to be women. END COMMENT.

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